Finding Elizabeth: Construing Memory in Elizabeth Is Missing by Emma Healey

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Abstract

Elizabeth Is Missing by Emma Healey was published in 2014 and won the Costa Award for best first novel. Both humorous and sad, it has been categorised as literary fiction, detective fiction and a psychological thriller, and is thus a "hybrid" genre novel that is difficult to categorise neatly. The novel's chief protagonist and narrator is Maud, who has dementia. As a narrator Maud is extremely unreliable and often forgets facts and events even as they are unfolding around her. Maud's memories, however, have a much higher degree of specificity than her present day narratives: they are richer, more detailed, and therefore much more reliable, than the narrative of her current life. Consequently, the novel is characterised by a stylistic contrast between the vague and the specific, the remembered and the forgotten.

In order to investigate this contrast, this paper argues that a stylistic account of Cognitive Grammar can shed further light on how Maud's cognitive habits are represented in the novel, and are represented in the novel, and how these in turn impact upon text-world representation. The analysis draws upon Cognitive Grammar's construal processes, in particular, to explore the fictive illustration of mind style – and of memory – in this literary context. Finally, this paper considers how one of the particular experiences of reading the narrative is dependent on the "layered construal" prevalent in the text, whereby a reader's experience of the fictional world is continually contrasted with that of the narrator.

Keywords

Dementia, Elizabeth Is Missing*, Cognitive Grammar, mind style, Text World Theory*

1 *Elizabeth Is Missing*

Elizabeth Is Missing (Healey 2014) is a contemporary bestseller that follows the day-to-day life of Maud, an 80-something year old homodiegetic narrator who has dementia. The narrative moves between Maud's present, in which her friend Elizabeth is missing, and Maud's life as a younger woman and the events surrounding the disappearance of her older sister, Sukey. In this way, a parallel mystery is established in the novel, in which two women have disappeared, seventy years apart from each other. These parallel mysteries cause confusion for Maud, who begins to blur together characters and events from her youth with those in her present. Of course, the unreliability of Maud's narration makes her an unlikely choice for the protagonist of a "dementia detective story" (Groskop 2014), but it is argued that it is this intersection between the mystery and Maud's failing memory that makes the novel both darkly funny and, simultaneously, an emotional reading experience for many readers (Gillies 2014).

Accounts of dementia are becoming increasingly prevalent in contemporary fiction (Manthorpe 2005) as the public gains an "increasing awareness" of the disorder more generally (Vassilas 2003: 439). Consequently, such accounts are also beginning to be explored through stylistic analysis. A recent study carried out by Lugea (2016), for example, observes how particular style choices in the play *You and Me* (Simeon 2011; Shanahan 2013) set up a text-world structure that creates an "absurd aesthetic", but one that nevertheless captures a "realistic" representation of senile world-views. Certainly a theme of memory loss can be seen in other popular contemporary thrillers such as *The Girl on the Train* (Hawkins 2015), *Before I Go to Sleep* (Watson 2014) and *Black-Eyed Susans* (Heaberlin 2015), which similarly centre on an intradiegetic narrator who has a particular mystery to solve. Indeed, one reviewer explicitly makes a

connection between *Elizabeth Is Missing* and the wider trend for unreliable narrators in contemporary fiction by labelling the text *Gone Gran* (Urwin 2014).

The way in which Maud construes the world around her creates a strong impression of her perspective: her idiosyncratic "mind style" (Fowler 1986; see also Palmer 2004; Semino 2002). As Semino (2002: 97) argues, the term "mind style" captures "those aspects of world views that are primarily personal and cognitive in origin, and which are either peculiar to a particular individual, or common to people who have the same cognitive characteristics". Additionally, the representation of a particular world view displays "an individual's characteristic cognitive habits, abilities and limitations" (Semino 2002: 97).

Maud's main "limitation" is her memory, and consequently one of the linguistic habits that reveals her "characteristic cognitive habits" is repetition. This can be seen in the following paragraph in which Maud describes her system for tracking Elizabeth's whereabouts:

Extract 1

> *The thing is to be systematic; try to write everything down.* Elizabeth is missing, and I must do something to find out what's happened. But I'm so muddled. I can't be sure about when I last saw her or what I've discovered. I've phoned and there's no answer. I haven't seen her. I think. She hasn't been here and I haven't been there. What next? I suppose I should go to the house. Search for clues. *And whatever I find I will write it down*. I must put pens into my handbag now. *The thing is to be systematic. I've written that too.*
>
> (Healey 2014: 22. Emphasis added)

Ironically, Maud's repeated references to her "systematic" writing system belie her rigour as a "systematic" detective, but other characteristic cognitive habits of Maud's perspective can also be clearly observed in Extract 1.

As is typical for homodiegetic narration, the "present day" narrative encodes a close spatial proximity with Maud's deictic centre ("She hasn't been *here* and I haven't been *there*"), and these descriptions also move between being temporally anchored in the present moment ("I must put pens into my handbag *now*") and in the simple past, often in directly alternating sentences ("But I'm so muddled. I can't be sure about when I last saw her or what I've discovered"). Maud's disorientation is further signposted through the frequent use of modality. For example, categorical assertions are often mitigated by modals: "verba sentiendi" (Uspensky 1973) ("I haven't seen her. I *think*"), modal auxiliaries ("I *must* do something to find out what's happened"; "I *should* go to the house") and "words of estrangement" (Fowler 1986) ("I *suppose* I should go"). The predominance of epistemic modality that underlies the narrative "negatively shades" (Simpson 2004) the text and positions Maud as an archetypal bewildered narrator, and one who is incontestably unreliable.

As the following close textual analysis shows, in contrast to these less specific and less certain descriptions of her present day life, Maud's memories are comparatively highly detailed. These flashbacks are often triggered by people or objects in Maud's surrounding environment, or by situations that are happening around her. This stylistic contrast emphasises a cognitive habit that people typically associate with those living with dementia. That is, it appears that Maud's memory of particular events from her past is much clearer, more detailed and more reliable than those in her present. In other words, she is no longer able to successfully form new episodic memories (see Tulving 1972). Alongside other features such as difficulties with concentration, thinking and language, this is identified as a distinctive feature of dementia (NHS Dementia Guide 2017: 10).

In an interview on the process of writing the novel, Healey mentioned that her own grandmother has dementia, and further described how her account of Maud's perspective in this text is in part an attempt to explain "what was happening inside her [grandmother's] head" (O'Keeffe 2014). Whether a conscious choice or not on the part of the author, the stylistic contrast between working and episodic memory nevertheless presents a narrator who fulfils cultural stereotypes about how dementia affects memory retrieval. Certainly, the narrative style of *Elizabeth Is Missing* exhibits common stylistic features such as extreme disorientation, repetition, under-specification, recurrent motifs and unusual narratological presentation, amongst others, which are identified as prevalent in autobiographical narratives written by those with other serious neurological conditions (see Emmott and Alexander 2015).

This paper provides a cognitive stylistic account of the representation of Maud's memory by applying some central ideas of construal (Langacker 1991, Langacker 2008) to consider *how* Maud's distinctive world-view is presented in the novel. It builds on previous accounts of Cognitive Grammar's reference points in the creation of literary texture (Stockwell 2009) and construal to explore mind attribution (Nuttall 2015) and addresses two main aims: (1) to consider the cognitive stylistic representation of memory in fiction; and (2) to show how a stylistic account using Cognitive Grammar concepts can enrich a text-world analysis of mind style. In exploring these two aims, the article finally argues that a "layered construal" process is invited by the text and plays a pivotal role in how this narrative is experienced by readers.

2 A cognitive stylistic account of mind style

The next two sections provide a brief outline of the stylistic "tools" (Wales 2014) applied in this paper to explore the representation of Maud's mind style: Text World Theory, and Cognitive Grammar. Section 3 analyses a particular episode within the text, using these tools, and identifies three stylistic traits prevalent in the narrative.

2.1. Text World Theory

Text World Theory is a discourse-processing model used in cognitive stylistics to account for how readers create mental representations of the fictional worlds they read about. First devised by the linguist Paul Werth (1999), the model outlines three conceptual structures that are encountered in reading.

Firstly, a reader encounters the discourse-world. This is a conceptual structure that encompasses all the contextual information of the reading experience, including the experiential baggage surrounding the writer, reader, and the immediate situational context. Readers of *Elizabeth Is Missing* might, for example, incorporate information from the blurb, any extra knowledge about the writer Emma Healey, or any personal information about family members who have had dementia into their individual reading experience. The discourse-world is a "highly dynamic" construction and one that evolves throughout the reading process (Gavins 2007: 20).

The second world experienced by a reader is the text-world proper. This structure presents the fictional world of the text, and is created and maintained through world-builders (the description of objects, locations, characters, and so on) and function-advancers (references to processes that help to advance the plot) within the narrative. When the parameters of a text-world are changed (for example, through a perspectival shift, or through a change in time or modalisation) a new text-world, also

known as a world-switch (Gavins 2007), is created. These departures from the initial text-world constitute the third conceptual level of a reading experience.

2.2 Cognitive Grammar: Construal

Cognitive Grammar is a model of grammar that, along with other cognitive linguistic models, asserts that all language is embodied. First developed in the late eighties by Ronald Langacker (1987), Cognitive Grammar remains unchanged in its fundamentals, and due "to subsequent findings in modern linguistics, cognitive science, and psychology that support its claims, [Cognitive Grammar] has lost some of its radical image and gained many adherents" (Bennett 2014: 29).

The benefits of Cognitive Grammar for cognitive stylistic analysis, and for the particular consideration of perspective and mind attribution (Nuttall 2015), are beginning to be explored (see, for examples, Hamilton 2003; Harrison et al. 2014; Harrison 2014; Harrison forthcoming 2017; Stockwell 2009; van Vliet 2009). Within these existing analyses it is generally agreed upon that Cognitive Grammar offers a text-focused account of the experiences of reading, and consequently "a seamlessly principled treatment of text, textuality and texture" (Stockwell 2014: 33).

While Cognitive Grammar offers an extensive account of language structures, one central concept will be considered in this study: construal. It is also worth noting at this point that the account of Cognitive Grammar outlined in this paper has scaled up these concepts in order to depart from the word-by-word/ sentential application, as in the original work of Langacker, to explore units of discourse that are above the level of the clause. While there is not room to expand upon the extension of these ideas here, a further exposition on the scalability of Cognitive Grammar concepts and their suitability

for stylistic analysis is outlined in more detail elsewhere (see, for example, Harrison et al. 2014; Harrison 2017).

Within Cognitive Grammar the meaning of an utterance comprises both conceptual content and a particular construal of content, which is "our manifest ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways" (Langacker 2008: 43; see also Croft and Cruse 2004; Verhagen 2007). In order to describe construal further Langacker (2008: 55) uses a visual metaphor. He likens the linguistic content of an utterance to the scene, construal to the way in which the scene is viewed, and the conceptualiser (the speaker or writer) to the viewer of that scene (see also Langacker 1993 for construal "universals"). There are four broad classes of construal phenomena, but the two that will be applied in this analysis are "specificity" (how specific or schematic the language is); and "prominence" (how attention is drawn to particular parts of a conceptual whole). A construal can be either objective (placing more emphasis on what is being described), or subjective (placing more emphasis on the conceptualiser of the scene. Within the context of fiction, for example, this would be a narrator).

The construal of a text is often dependent on "reference points", which are "the (initial) focus of attention" at which a referent is introduced: the first mention of a subject (Croft and Cruse 2004: 51). As Littlemore and Taylor (2014: 8) explain,

> Whenever we wish to locate a particular object in our surroundings, or direct our listener's attention to it, we typically do so by appealing to a salient reference point. Candidates for the reference point function are features of the landscape, large immovable objects, as well as human beings (especially speaker and hearer) and animate creatures more generally.

If this idea is considered alongside an account of Text World Theory, it could be said that a reference point is a particularly prominent world-builder: one that orients other linguistic and conceptual information. In summary, reference point relationships

demonstrate how, in language, "we have the ability to invoke the conception of one entity in order to establish "mental contact" with another" (Langacker 2008: 83).

In Extract 1, for example, superordinately the reference points are the two characters, Elizabeth and Maud. "Elizabeth" is a salient reference point, maintained as a point of attention in the extract through the anaphoric feminine pronouns, "her". Equally, all actions that Maud lists ("I've phoned", "I haven't seen her", "I should go to the house. Search for clues") are oriented around the central fact: "Elizabeth is missing and I must do something to find out what's happened" (Healey 2014: 22). Of course, another salient "global reference point" (van Vliet 2009) throughout the narrative is the narrating "I" persona, Maud. She is retained as a reference point in a reader's working memory throughout reading the novel; all first person pronouns function to situate the construal of the fictional world from her perspective.

2.3 Construing text-worlds: Reader and character perspectives

Preliminary research has been carried out on the relationship between construal and Text World Theory, specifically (Giovanelli 2016; Harrison forthcoming 2017; Nuttall 2014; van Vliet 2009). A pertinent Cognitive Grammar study that similarly explores shifting perspectives and "condensed viewpoints", for example, is Nuttall's (2014) chapter "Constructing a text world for *The Handmaid's Tale*". Nuttall's paper provides a detailed frame-by-frame analysis of a descriptive scene from *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood 1996), in which readers are required to "sequentially scan" (Langacker 1987) individual parts of the scene in order to create a holistic conceptualisation of the room being described. In the original work of Langacker (1987), sequence and "summary scanning" described how readers process different verb types. For example,

it is argued that a sentence like *Maud walks down the street* is scanned differently than *Maud is down the street*. We can construe the former sentence as a dynamic sequence, picturing how Maud progresses from one end of the street to the other; while in the latter sentence, a summative, more static, position is captured.

Nuttall (2014: 94) argues that the sequential structuring of text-world components in *The Handmaid's Tale* means that the holistic conception becomes disrupted, and that, consequently,

> emphasis is placed instead upon the sequential processing of these conceptions as they emerge in the mind of the narrator, foregrounding the movement between memories, direct speech, beliefs and possibilities of which [the] narrative is composed.

Following Nuttall (2014) I argue that this scanning process occurs on the text-world level in *Elizabeth Is Missing*, but that while readers are able to sequentially scan events as they evolve in the narrative, Maud, in contrast, scans events differently. Readers can "mentally [track] an event as it unfolds through time" (Langacker 2008: 111) – and are likely to retain the world-building information that helps them to navigate through the various text-worlds of the story despite its fragmented structure (Dancygier 2007). This is because readers retain facts about the world of the text and, particularly in the case of detective fiction, attend to the narrator as a "cooperative" discourse participant who will provide relevant clues regarding the narrative resolution (Mullins and Dixon 2007: 274). Conversely, Maud can only construe events summatively. After experiencing a flashback and returning to the present day, she forgets facts of which she was previously aware (see analysis in Section 3.3). This process similarly signposts how such conceptions "emerge in the mind of the narrator" (Nuttall 2014: 94) and explains her disorientation and disconnected construal of events.

Consequently, one of the most distinctive experiential processes of reading the novel is that Maud's construal of the fictional world is contrasted with our own (see Section 3.3). The analysis of this paper addresses how this "layered construal" is established in the narrative. In particular, in the next sections the key ideas introduced here – text-world creation, construal and scanning – will be applied in combination to explore how the fictional world of *Elizabeth Is Missing* is stylistically represented, and, accordingly, how Maud's distinctive perspective is experienced.

3 Text analysis: Maud's cognitive habits

The parallel narrative arcs in *Elizabeth Is Missing* (the mystery of Elizabeth's current disappearance, and the historic disappearance of Maud's older sister Sukey) mean that, superordinately, there are two text-worlds across the novel that are grounded in two (broad) spatiotemporal planes: (1) the narrative of the present day, and (2) the narrative that describes Maud's early adulthood, which is represented via flashbacks. In turn, the parallel text-world structure across the novel creates, at the macro level of the text, a conflation of two salient narrative reference points: Sukey and Elizabeth, the two missing characters. These characters maintain prominent places within the narrative, and are easily evoked and recalled as the focus of attention.

On a scene by scene level, however, the scanning processes and construal of the fictional world is more complicated. Maud's narration moves between present and past often within the same scene and this movement is frequently triggered by particularly salient world-builders in her immediate environment, such as the broken plate in Extract 2 below. The flashbacks "destabilise" (McHale 1992) the present day narrative

(as observed in the following analysis), which in turn functions to represent Maud's disorientation and the readers' experience of it.

The next three sections (Section 3.1 – 3.3) address the representation of Maud's construal by providing a close textual analysis of a particular scene from the novel.

3.1 Reference points as world-switch triggers

One of the most distinctive cognitive habits Maud exhibits in the novel is how she shifts her attention between the past and the present. The movement from present to past and back again can be clearly observed in the text-worlds of this scene, which appears early in the novel where Maud's daughter Helen has taken her out to lunch at a restaurant (the "Chophouse") that Maud used to visit with her husband, Patrick, when he was alive.

Prior to this moment in the text, Helen has become frustrated with Maud's forgetfulness, and Maud, sensing this, in turn becomes angry. Initially, the scene is located within the text-world of the present (TW1), in which Maud is eating lunch with Helen. Particular world-building information regarding the location (the Chophouse restaurant), the time (present) and the characters present (Maud, Helen and "somebody") has already been established. Maud loses her temper and breaks a plate, which triggers a world-switch: a flashback to her past (TW2). The image of the broken plate reminds Maud of her older sister's broken records that she found in the garden, shortly after Sukey had gone missing.

The graphological break in the text helps separate the initial text-world (TW1) from this first world-switch, and Helen's direct speech ("'I have to pick Katy up in less

than half an hour' says Helen") returns the narrative to the text-world of the present ("I'm still finishing my ice cream").

Extract 2

I don't answer; my teeth are still tight together. I feel I might start screaming, but breaking something, that's a good idea. That's exactly what I want to do. I pick up my butter knife and stab it into the black side plate. The china breaks. Helen says something, swearing I think, and somebody rushes towards me. I keep looking at the plate. The middle has crumbled slightly and it looks like a broken record, a broken gramophone record.

I found some once in our back garden. They were in the vegetable patch, smashed to bits and jumbled together. Ma had sent me out to help Dad when I'd got back from school and he'd handed me his shovel for digging a runner-bean trench, before disappearing into the shed. The records were almost the same colour as the soil and I wouldn't have found them, only I felt something snap as I dug and a few moments later the shards caught between the prongs of my fork [...]

It didn't take me long to connect the pieces, and it was nice work in the winter sun, listening to the music of the pigeons as they cooed to one another. It was like doing a jigsaw puzzle, except that even when I'd finished there were still some bits missing. I could read the labels now, though: 'Virginia', 'We Three' and 'I'm Nobody's Baby'.

I sat back on my heels. These were my sister's favourites, the ones she always asked Douglas to play. And now here they were, smashed up and buried amongst the remains of rhubarb and onions. [...]

'I have to pick Katy up in less than half an hour,' Helen says, getting her coat on, despite the fact that I'm still finishing my ice cream.

It's nice and cold against my tongue, but I can't work out what flavour it's meant to be. Strawberry, I suppose, from the colour. I'll need the loo, too, before we go. I wonder where the Ladies is. I wonder if I've been to this restaurant before. It reminds me of the lovely old Chophouse that Patrick and I used to meet in when we were courting. It wasn't expensive, didn't have exotic food or white tablecloths, but everything was nicely cooked and well laid out. I used to walk down from the exchange at lunchtime and wait at a table by the window. Patrick would get a tram from the pier where his firm were working on plans for re-building, and he'd come loping along, hair swept about and cheeks red, and he'd grin as soon as he saw me. No one grins at me like that now.

'Do you need the loo, Mum?'

'No, no. I don't think so.'

'Okay then. Let's go.'

She's not very pleased with me. I'd obviously done something. Was it embarrassing? Did I say something to the waiter? I don't like to ask.

(Healey 2014: 19–21)

Revisiting the present day after the flashback means that Maud does not recognise her current location explicitly ("I wonder if I've been to this restaurant before"), but it is familiar enough to activate a memory of her husband. This triggers another world-switch (TW3): Maud's mind wanders back to the past to the time when she used to visit the restaurant before ("It reminds me of the lovely old Chophouse Patrick and I used to visit when we were courting") (this second flashback is analysed further in Section 3.3). The summary of the text-world structure of Extract 2 can be conceptually represented as in Figure 1 below.

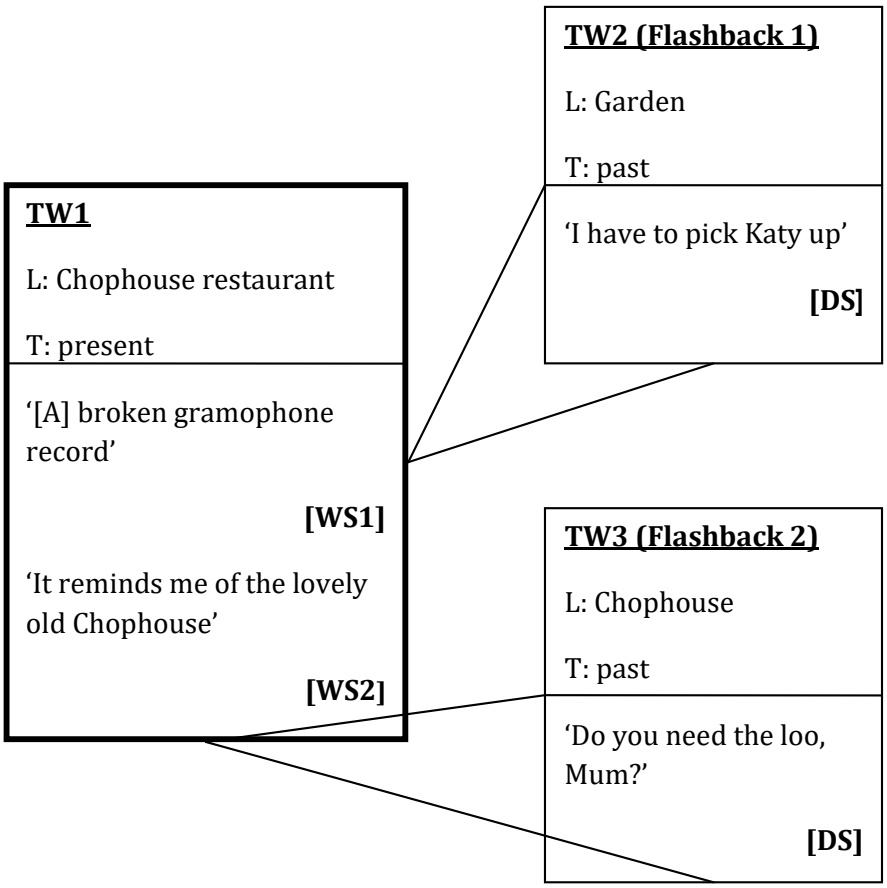

Figure 1. Text-world structure of Extract 2

The text-world structure of this extract exemplifies the set-up of many other scenes in the novel. Frequently throughout *Elizabeth Is Missing* particular reference

points either trigger world-switches or become chained across world boundaries to form a "narrative anchor" (Dancygier 2007) between the two text-worlds (as discussed in more detail in Section 3.3).

The connection between fictional worlds in the first world-switch is traced here through the fact that Maud compares the plate and the records, due to shared schematic similarities regarding the visual appearance of both items: they are both black in colour, both are circular and both are broken. The prominence given to the plate/records world-builder means that it functions as a narrative reference point; a salient part of the world that is instrumental for Maud's construal and a foregrounded "feature of the landscape" (Littlemore and Taylor 2014: 8).

In her mind, when she re-experiences this memory as an "enactor" (Emmott 1992) of her younger self, the broken plate in TW1 becomes the broken records in TW2, and despite the fact that a new text-world is represented, the connection between these world-builders tethers this flashback world to Maud's present day world. Although most of the other world-building information – the time, the location and the characters present – has changed, within the text-world of Maud's flashback the broken gramophone record then becomes reconstrued (cf. Forrest 2001) as a new reference point that situates this flashback text-world in parallel with the first: "I found *some* in our back garden". This text-world parallel is maintained through the initial ambiguity generated by the indefinite pronoun ("some") at this point in the extract. Until the noun phrase ("The records") is explicitly mentioned four lines into the flashback, both the broken plate and the broken records are activated as potential references for "some". This creates an interesting conceptual effect that reinforces the connection between the two text-worlds.

As well as causing a world-switch, the description of the plate/records is more detailed than the other world-builders in TW1 and TW2. In other words, although a description of other elements of Maud's TW1 environment is more schematic (“Helen says *something*, swearing *I think*”; “*somebody* rushes towards me”, emphasis added), the construal of the plate is more highly specified. Maud describes, specifically, the colour, observes further that “the black side plate” is made out of “china”, and that the “middle has crumbled slightly and it looks like a broken record, a broken gramophone record”.

While this process of objects triggering flashbacks is not necessarily a distinctive feature of dementia in itself, it is the fact that these references become chained across world boundaries and that they become recurrent motifs within the narrative discourse that marks this as a distinctive stylistic trait. The importance of such motifs in text-world creation suggests their significance as part of the wider narrative development; thus enabling readers to piece together clues – despite Maud's unreliability.

3.2 Semantic memory: Lexical under-/ over-specification

Difficulties with “finding the right word” even for quite everyday phenomena is also seen as an identifying feature of dementia (Alzheimer's Society Dementia Guide: 13), and these difficulties are signposted by the movement between lexical under- and over-specification in the novel. Both lexical under- and over-specification are used in the text to give prominence to particular world-builders that would not, in other contexts, necessarily be an “attractor” (Stockwell 2009). Much of this over-specification occurs through the “singling out” of particular components of the text-world environment. The shifts in attention as the narrative progresses are highly salient, and a distinctive feature of Maud's world-view.

In Extract 2 this can be seen in the description of the plate/record that connects TW1 and TW2. Like other flashbacks in the novel, the reference point is described with increasing amounts of information within this new text-world (TW2), and with increasingly higher levels of lexical specificity. In TW2 the records are described as a collection ("I found some"), given further identifying features regarding their locative information ("They were in the vegetable patch") and their colour ("The records were almost the same colour as the soil"), and as the pieces are reassembled, the labels of the records become fully nominalised: "Virginia", "We Three", "I'm Nobody's Baby". Finally, and even more significantly, the records are identified as belonging to Maud's missing sister: "These were my sister's favourites, the ones she always asked Douglas to play".

Additionally, within the episodic memory of the flashback Maud also assumes a different enactor role: she becomes a younger version of herself, experiencing the sequence of events as she did at the time. This new viewing position allows Maud to profile particular world-building and function-advancing details that make up the memory: how, specifically, she had just "got back from school"; how she was "listening to the music of the pigeons as they cooed to one another"; how there were "rhubarb and onions" in the "bean trench" in front of her, and so on.

The high level of specificity is identified by some of the online reviews of the novel, which state that, at times, Maud's "state of mind allows her to describe mundane details with intricacy and emotional depth, as if seen through a magnifying glass" (Groskop 2014) – a description that echoes Stockwell's (2009: 182) comments on the usefulness of Cognitive Grammar's reference point model to elucidate "radial adjustment"; the "experientiality" of zooming in and out of a scene. This "magnifying glass" effect is seen in the increasingly prominent representation of these records. At this point in the story it has been established that Sukey has disappeared under

mysterious circumstances, and the attention paid to the broken gramophone records forces readers to dwell, in a similar fashion to Maud, on this piece of information. Unlike Maud, however, we do not know the significance of these broken records. Are they a clue as to what happened so long ago? Why were they broken, and is this relevant to why Sukey disappeared?

At other times, however, there are occasions in the novel (in the present-day narrative, exclusively) where Maud cannot remember the nominal reference for certain everyday objects. In other words, the "mental thesaurus" that makes up her semantic memory (Tulving 1972: 386) is also indicated through her construal. To circumnavigate these memory gaps, Maud instead relies on descriptions of an object's schematic properties, as in the following examples that appear in other parts of the novel:

- "bread-heater, the bread browner" (Healey 2014: 82);
- "his neckcloth thing, not a scarf, not a cravat" (Healey 2014: 154);
- "a packet of lamp posts, tiny lamp posts with lead through the middle" (Healey 2014: 217).

In these examples, each referent is given greater prominence through the fact that it is not labelled directly. Instead, a series of targets are listed that cluster around the lacuna of the actual name (a toaster, a tie, and a packet of pencils, respectively). Often Maud's descriptions include repeated labels ("*bread*-heater, the *bread* browner"; "a packet of *lamp posts,* tiny *lamp posts"*), or explicitly rule out potential possibilities ("*not a* scarf, *not a* cravat", emphasis added). Where Semino (2014a: 284) identifies that such "underlexicalisation" (Fowler 1986) in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon 2003) is a sign of the protagonist Christopher's restricted vocabulary due to a lack of social experience, here Maud's under-specification is a characteristic feature of her memory loss.

Additionally, these underspecified descriptions function to make Maud's construal more subjective. In Cognitive Grammar terms, this means that the conceptualiser of the scene – in this instance Maud, as the narrator – is more prominent than the object of conceptualisation. Whereas the high level of specificity given to particular reference points – such as the broken plates/ gramophone records in Extract 2 – places more emphasis on the objects themselves, the more schematic language by contrast signposts Maud's prominent position within the narrative. Arguably, Maud's subjective construal is more apparent in the narrative of the present-day text-world (as also argued by Groskop 2014), where, in addition to the more schematic language as in these three latter examples, her position as the conceptualiser of the scene is constantly reinforced through modalised expressions. As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, this is frequently signposted through the predominance of epistemic modality ("I feel I might", "I think", "I can't work out", "I suppose", "I wonder" (x2), "It reminds me", "I don't think").

The prominence of Maud's subjective position creates a narrative "rupturing effect" (Cobley 2001: 241–242) in that these style markers continuously remind a reader of Maud's unreliability. Simply put, these modal constructions in the present day narrative maintain the layered construal that is at the centre of reading this text. As in the case of the three underspecified references listed here, for example, readers are placed in the position of providing the missing information themselves, from their extra-textual knowledge. This therefore invites a reader to maintain an awareness of their own understanding of events – their discourse-world position – alongside the construal of events as described by the narrator.

3.3 Narrative (dis)continuity: Summary and sequence scanning

The final distinctive stylistic feature of Maud's memory loss that will be discussed here is her inability to successfully scan the progression of one scene into another. With those who have dementia, this inability results in confusion about time or place and can mean "getting lost or no knowing where you are, even in a familiar place" (NHS Dementia Guide 2017: 13).

It has been observed earlier in this paper how the two text-world structures (the initial present day text-world and the flashback worlds) are established as parallel worlds, each tracing a separate path within Maud's conceptualisation of each respective mystery. As acknowledged in the analysis of TW3 in Section 3.1, however, after Maud returns to the present day following a flashback, she has difficulties reconstruing the scene. She forgets salient pieces of information that would otherwise help to re-orient her within her surrounding environment. Again, it is not the fact that Maud simply experiences flashbacks but rather the impact that this has on the narrative structure that marks this out as an interesting and unusual trait of her mind-style. As Dancygier (2007: 139) argues, a "flashback does not just break the sequence, but breaks it so that important aspects of story construction are highlighted – such as the character's current psychological state" (2007: 139).

This can be observed in the second flashback in the extract. In the second half of Extract 2, the most salient "feature of the landscape" (Littlemore and Taylor 2014: 8), the location itself, remains the same and yet Maud does not recognise it. Instead, her construal outlines a comparison between past and present versions of the Chophouse restaurant, as represented in Figure 2, without explicitly acknowledging that they are, in fact, the same place. This comparison means that, in contrast to the plate/records

connection between TW1 and TW2, the world-builders in TW1 and TW3 match each other more directly (see Figure 2).

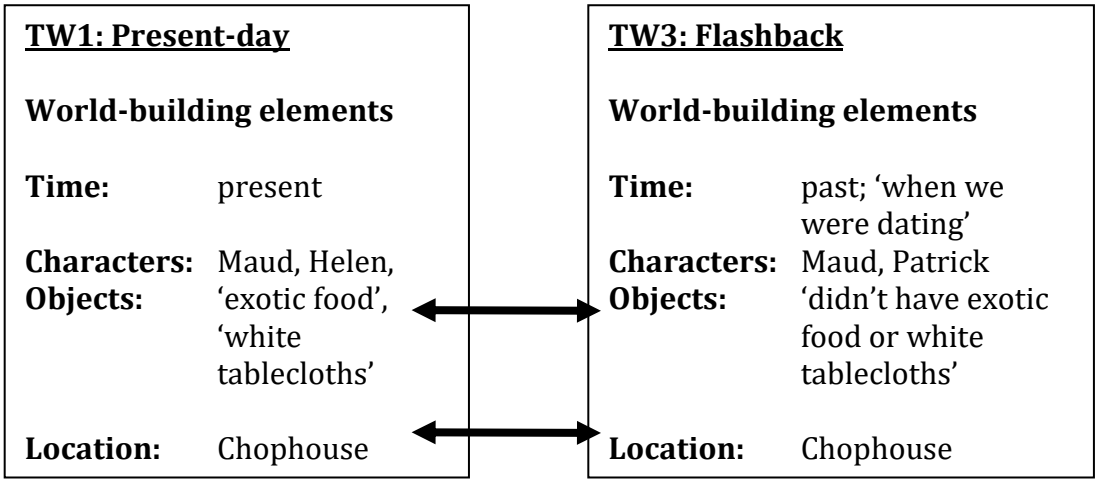

Figure 2. World-building connections between TW1 and TW3.

Like in the previous flashback, Maud appears in this text-world as an enactor of her younger self and re-experiences what she "used to" do ("I used to walk down from the exchange at lunchtime"). This flashback is different from the first in that it outlines a previous routine; a habitual action rather than one particular episode. In further contrast with the previous world-switch, Maud shows a greater awareness of this second flashback as being temporally removed from her current situation. This is demonstrated, for example, through the fact that, on this occasion, Maud's attention becomes refocused on the surrounding scene (TW1) through the progression of her own thoughts ("No one grins at me like that now") before Helen's direct speech again brings her more fully back to the present ("Do you need the loo, Mum?")

Despite not explicitly acknowledging the similarity between her memory of the Chophouse and the contemporary Chophouse, Maud's comparison foregrounds the faint

recognition she is experiencing. This can be observed through the use of negative constructions that "accommodate" (Werth 1999) features of one text-world in another. She indirectly describes the present-day Chophouse by describing what the past-Chophouse does not have: "It wasn't expensive, didn't have exotic food or white tablecloths, but everything was nicely cooked and well laid out". These descriptions mean that, like with Maud's elaborative description of the broken plates/record, certain parts of the scene are given greater prominence and, consequently, greater significance.

That she is focusing on the differences between the two places suggests that she, to some extent, acknowledges the connections between them. This is reinforced through Maud's description of her routine of "waiting by *the* window". In Cognitive Grammar, "the" as a nominal grounding predication implies one entity that is known by both speaker and listener, which again emphasises this point of connection across the two worlds. This second flashback almost seems like a "spot the difference" exercise, in which Maud is comparing her memory against the present day.

The fact that the spatial coordinates have remained the same – she is in the restaurant, in both text-worlds – again makes TW3 less conceptually distinct from TW1. However, rather than acting as a "narrative anchor" (Dancygier 2007) that helps to reinstate the location for both Maud and readers, this comparison and conflation of text-worlds in Extract 2 means that both flashbacks create disorientation in the narrative: they function to destabilise Maud's construal of her surrounding environment.

After the appearance of TW2, for example, TW1 is recalled after the next graphological break and through Helen's use of direct speech ("I have to pick Katy up"), which re-asserts her position in Maud's immediate surroundings. The reinstatement of particular world-builders – the character Helen, for example – and the shift to the present tense ("Helen says") suggest to a reader that TW1 has been returned to. Clearly,

however, both flashbacks disrupt Maud's construal of events. In contrast to readers, she returns to the present day unsure of facts of which she was previously aware. This means that after the return to the initial text-world the narrative appears *in medias res* (as explicitly signposted with the grounding within the present continuous: "I'm still finishing my ice cream"), with certain pieces of information missing – either world-builders that have not been mentioned at all in the narrative ("I can't work out what flavour it's meant to be. Strawberry, I suppose, from the colour"), or those that have been explicitly mentioned earlier, such as the location ("I wonder if I've been to this restaurant before?"). Similarly, before the second flashback Maud mentions that she'll "need the loo, too, before we go", but then she forgets this fact after the second flashback ("'Do you need the loo, Mum?' 'No, no. I don't think so'"). Extract 2 ends back in TW1 where Maud cannot remember what has just happened: the broken plate incident ("I'd obviously done something. Was it embarrassing?"). Each flashback acts as an attentional override, shifting her focus – and, consequently, ours – away from her dinner with Helen.

In their original application in Cognitive Grammar, summary and sequence scanning describe how language users mentally process actions and events up to the level of the clause. Of course, if these ideas are scaled up beyond grammatical categories, it could be argued that, in reading, text-worlds are similarly processed. In other words, a narrative is typically "conceived as changing, with one single state captured at a time" (Patard and Brisard 2011: 201) (Langacker 1987); "the transformation of a configuration into another or a continuous series of transformations" (Patard and Brisard 2011: 201–202). Readers are able to follow the progression of a narrative by keeping track of world-building information (in Extract 2, for example, the process of Maud continuing her dinner, the presence of Helen, the

restaurant, and so on), and through recognising that particular worlds are grounded in particular moments in time. After world-switches such as flashbacks, the information of the primary text-world is re-activated when referenced again in the narrative. In this way, readers are able to "pick up" the narrative thread when the primary text-world is reinstated. They can adduce a summary scan of previous information, in order to see the sequential "transformation of a configuration into another" in the text.

It is Maud's inability to successfully acknowledge the transformation of one scene into another – in contrast to a reader's ability to do so – that creates disorientation in Maud's narrative, and, arguably, our experience of reading it. Maud recognises some pieces of information from previous events or situations (she is not surprised, for instance, by Helen's presence when she returns to TW1 in this extract), but certain facts of her surrounding environment are erased. Another example of this summative construal occurs in a scene at the beginning of the novel, when Helen visits her mother to vacuum the house. Maud forgets that she has arrived, and because Helen is "off-stage" visually from her perspective, she decays from Maud's active memory. As such Maud can hear the vacuum cleaner but does not know what is making the noise, and describes it as a "roaring noise" (Healey 2014: 10), "a sort of growl somewhere in the house" (Healey 2014: 11), and then, simply, "the roaring" (Healey 2014: 12).

Maud struggles to keep track of information from her present day through time, which causes each text-world to appear disconnected from the others. The missing information means that world-builders – and also function-advancers, as observed in the repetition in Extract 1 ("The thing is to be systematic. I've written that too") – are continually acknowledged and reinstated in her construal of events.

The disconnection between the text-world structures, or rather the fact that each new text-world disrupts the narrative sequence means that Maud appears to see the

world around her as a series of multiple-exposure photographs rather than as a moving film (to adopt Langacker's [1987] metaphor to differentiate between summary and sequence scanning in language). This process accounts for the comparison of the same location, as represented in Figure 2. She can compare and activate simultaneous conceptualisations of the same scene, but cannot construe the transition from one into the other.

Simply put, a set feature of her mind style is that her attentional decay is faster than readers'. This is something readers are aware of, however. As argued by Mullins and Dixon 2007: 275), readers are able to follow narratives construed by unreliable narrators like Maud "because the reader creates a mental representation of the narrator's mental state and uses that representation in understanding the events of the story world". Again, this process and the consequent mental representation of Maud simply acts to further cast doubt on Maud's represented construal, and problematises the role she plays in what is superordinately a detective novel. To what extent can we trust the sequence of events we are presented with in this narrative? How many significant clues has Maud previously encountered, but since forgotten?

4 Conclusion: "It was like doing a jigsaw puzzle"

As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, integral to the novel is the mystery of Elizabeth's disappearance. This fact ties together much of the narrative, and also helps to ground Maud's thoughts:

> ‘Tell me. Tell me who it is. Who’s missing, Helen? Who am I looking for?’
> She says Elizabeth’s name, and hearing it is like falling into a soft bed.
>
> (Healey 2014: 166)

The fact of Elizabeth’s disappearance is mentioned, and forgotten, by Maud again and again. Maud does eventually find out where Elizabeth is, but it seems that the mystery of her disappearance holds a greater role in the orientation of Maud’s life than the answer itself.

This paper has argued that the reading experience of *Elizabeth Is Missing* is characterised by a contrast of construals. It is likely that readers of this text are in a more privileged position than Maud in that they can remember particular references and the details of the scene more generally, even if Maud does not. This creates a narrative rupturing effect, typical of postmodern fiction, whereby a text explicitly draws attention to the reader’s own interpretation of what they are reading – or, in this particular text, how an awareness of a reader’s own understanding of events is maintained alongside the construal of events as described by the narrator.

Maud’s inability to successfully form new memories has been shown to disrupt her present-day narrative, and these characteristic habits of dementia cause readers to identify the condition in Maud (Gillies 2014; Groskop 2014; Perry 2014), despite the fact that the words “dementia” or “Alzheimer’s” do not appear in the novel (see also Semino 2014a for a similar consideration of the absence of the labels “autism” or “Asperger” in Haddon’s (2003) *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*).

As observed in the analysis of this paper, Maud’s cognitive state is instead signposted through other stylistic patterns in the novel. Much of the discontinuity in Maud’s thought processes can be traced to the representation of reference points, for example, and how these act to trigger and conflate text-world construction.

Furthermore, Maud's repetition and dislocation of descriptions and references indicate how she lacks cohesion in her construal of the world around her. This combination of conflated reference points, world-switches, and summary scans works together to produce a highly disjointed narrative.

Of course, Maud's perspective is a fictional representation of the disorder, but the novel nevertheless shares stylistic traits found in autobiographical accounts of the condition. In line with the work of Semino (2014b), and Emmott and Alexander (2015), in future studies it would be beneficial to consider whether the stylistic patterns observed here are also apparent in other fiction and non-fiction accounts of the illness more generally – and to what extent the culturally entrenched views of the illness compare with real-world representations.

In summary, this paper has provided an account of narratorial perspective that aims to be both "nuanced" (Giovanelli 2016) and "text-driven" (Werth 1999). The combination of frameworks has allowed a consideration of the fine-grained attentional shifts that occur in the novel, alongside an exploration of how these shifts create wider patterns that impact on text-world construction at a more macro-level in the text. Although more work remains to be carried out on their integration, this paper has taken the initial steps to outline how a synthesised Cognitive Grammar and Text World Theory analysis can successfully account for the experiential representation of episodic memory within a fictional context.

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